



# The STEWARD

North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation  
[www.ncsparks.net](http://www.ncsparks.net) for State Parks Info and Events

Michael F. Easley  
 Governor

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William G. Ross Jr.  
 Secretary, DENR

## STATE PARKS, AUDUBON FORM PARTNERSHIP

By Chris Canfield  
 Audubon North Carolina

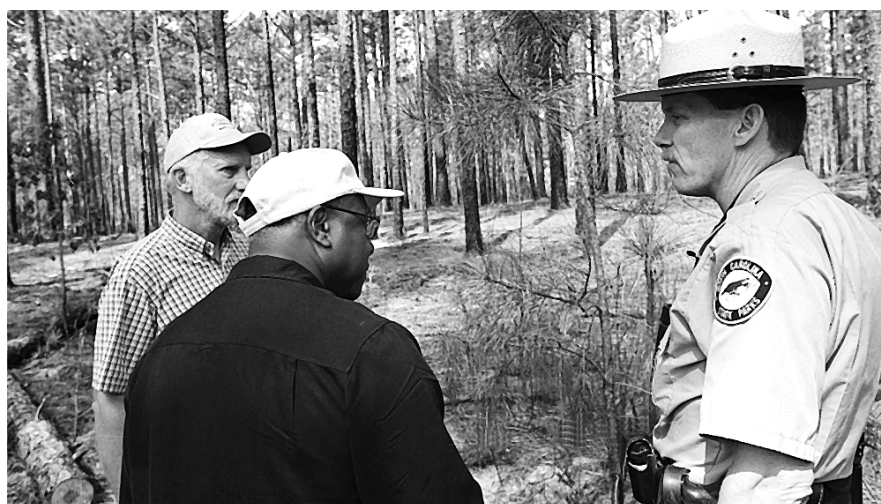
When T. Gilbert Pearson started the Audubon movement in North Carolina 100 years ago, he envisioned a state that valued conservation of natural lands for birds, other wildlife and for the enjoyment of citizens alike.

A decade later, North Carolina's leaders had embraced the vision. With the establishment of Mount Mitchell as the state's first protected natural area in 1916, a complementary movement began – the state parks movement.

Today, Audubon has a revived and growing presence in our state, boasting 12,000 members, seven active chapters, and a professional staff devoted to conservation and education. Our state parks now protect some 170,000 acres of natural areas while providing educational and recreational opportunities to millions of North Carolinians and other visitors each year.

To honor and forward

*C ONTINUED ON PAGE 13*



*FROM LEFT, RICK STUDENMUND OF THE NATURE CONSERVANCY AND REP. MARVIN LUCAS TALK WITH SUPERINTENDENT PAUL HART OF RAVEN ROCK STATE PARK DURING A FIELD TRIP FOR LEGISLATORS TO CARVERS CREEK.*

## NEW PARKS APPROVED SITES AT CARVERS CREEK, HICKORY NUT GORGE

The N.C. General Assembly has authorized new state parks at Carvers Creek Sandhills in Cumberland County and at Hickory Nut Gorge in western Rutherford County. Similar legislation in the House and Senate passed with a lone dissenting vote in the House.

The action opens the door

**THIS EDITION OF  
 THE STEWARD  
 SPONSORED BY  
 FRIENDS OF  
 GOOSE CREEK STATE PARK**

for the state parks system to begin negotiating with willing sellers for land acquisitions at both sites.

First on that list is the North Carolina chapter of The Nature Conservancy, which has committed to sell large, protected tracts at both locations. Those tracts may become core property of new state parks.

Both Carvers Creek Sandhills and Hickory Nut Gorge are among sites identified as high priority for conservation in the New Parks for a New Century

*C ONTINUED ON PAGE 12*

Department of Environment and Natural Resources

# UP CLOSE AND 'PERSONNEL'

**Christopher Brown** was hired at Lake Waccamaw State Park as a General Utility Worker. He has an associate's degree in park/outdoor recreation resources and one and a

half years experience as a park ranger and boat ramp attendant.

**O'Kelly Safley** has joined the staff at Falls Lake State Recreation Area as a Park

Ranger II. She has a bachelor's degree in recreation/business administration from Appalachian State University and 18 years experience as a superintendent of recreation and recreation supervisor.

**Philip King** was hired at Medoc Mountain State Park as a Park Ranger II. He has a bachelor's degree in administrative management from Excelsior College, studied for three years at Northern Arizona University, enrolled in parks and recreation management, and served three years in the U.S. Army.

**Jamie Jeffreys** has joined the staff at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area as a Maintenance Mechanic II. He has a certificate in electrical electronics and more than five years experience as a mechanic.

**Rebecca Wilson** is a new Park Ranger I at Raven Rock State Park. She has a bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and four months experience as a park ranger.

**Jo Ann Livingston** was hired at Mount Jefferson State Natural Area as an Office Assistant. She brings with her more than 14 years experience as an administrative assistant.

**Kathleen Mason** is the new Publications Coordinator/Internet Specialist for the division at the Archdale Building. She has a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Converse College and more than 20 years of related work experience in printing and as a graphics artist and instructor.

**Betty Anderson** is a new Office Assistant III at William B. Umstead State Park. She has almost 32 years of administrative work experience.

## From The Director's Desk

If there's a common theme that seems to run through this edition of *The Steward* – and that's a reflection of all that's going on in the division these days – it's about partnerships.

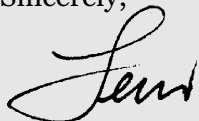
In moving toward new conservation efforts at Carvers Creek Sandhills and Hickory Nut Gorge, our partnership with The Nature Conservancy has been invaluable and every day we're finding new ways of refining and using that partnership for better results. The two projects for new state parks have also benefited from partnerships with other conservation agencies such as the Foothills Conservancy and with outdoor enthusiasts in western North Carolina, and with Ft. Bragg and the Sandhills Area Land Trust in the east. Moving into the next stage, I predict continued close cooperation among the trustees of the state's three conservation trust funds. To this point, the Natural Heritage Trust Fund has generously awarded \$4 million toward the Carvers Creek Sandhills project, and grant requests are before the Clean Water Management Trust Fund. Its trustees have shown strong interest in the project, sending representatives on a legislative field trip in April.

We're busy forging a new level of partnership with Audubon North Carolina based on our long association and on our mutual goals in conservation, education and research. It holds great promise for great things ahead.

Other examples mentioned in this newsletter are land conservancies, local governments and citizens at Lake James State Park; the University of North Carolina at Wilmington at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area; and the mountain bike trails clubs that have volunteered tirelessly to expand opportunities at Lake Norman State Park. There's likely to be good news ahead resulting from partnerships with the State Highway Patrol, the Division of Emergency Management and the Governor's Crime Commission regarding communications improvements and grant opportunities. And, then there are our joint efforts across the state with the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. Even printing and distribution of *The Steward* is the fruit of partnership with Friends of State Parks, our park advisory committees and other friends groups.

Everyone, including our visitors and the citizens of the state, can benefit from the synergy of committed partners working toward common goals. In this day and age, it's almost a prerequisite for success.

Sincerely,



Lewis Ledford

# LAKE JAMES MASTER PLAN ADVANCES

A master planning process for a greatly enlarged Lake James State Park entered the “idea-gathering stage” in April as planners traveled to Burke and McDowell counties to spend time listening to people who will be using the park and who will be its neighbors.

Residents tried to define their ideal state park in the informal public forums hosted by LandDesign, a Charlotte planning and landscape architecture firm hired by the state parks system to develop the plan.

The park’s long-range master plan is being adapted to include 2,915 acres purchased early this year from Crescent Resources Inc. The master plan will essentially be a blueprint for how the recently acquired acreage is to be developed in coming decades.

The plan is to be formally presented to the division in the spring of 2006.

The state and Crescent Resources reached agreement last summer to add the land to the state park for \$18.36 million, well below its appraised value. The acquisition expanded the park to six times its former size and allows the conservation of more than 30 miles of lakeshore.

The purchase was made possible through the use of certificates of participation backed by future revenues to the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and the Clean Water Management Trust Fund.

During both public sessions, swim areas, campgrounds and hiking and biking trails ranked high on residents’ wish lists, and they gave high priority to protecting the lake as a natural resource and scenic attraction.

Many people who attended also were intrigued by the potential for having campsites accessible by either car or boat and by reserving an area of the lake for canoeing and kayaking.

The property acquisition also puts state park property at a junction spot for different federal and state trail systems. Many people said they would favor a system of backcountry camping areas linked by trails.

Ranking lower in the priorities were RV camping and equestrian facilities.

Developing a master plan involves making critical decisions that will guide almost every aspect of development in a state park that already attracts more than 250,000 visitors a year. Some of the issues that the master plan will address include:



*THE MASTER PLAN WILL ALSO ADDRESS PROPOSALS FOR THE EXISTING STATE PARK AT LAKE JAMES.*

Which areas of the Longarm peninsula and Paddy Creek watershed are suitable as sites for facilities and which areas should be left to nature.

What types of recreational and education facilities – such as visitor center, swim beaches, boating access, campgrounds, picnic areas and trails – will be provided.

Where land and water access, road systems, maintenance compounds and other infrastructure will be located.

How trails and overlooks can be configured to take advantage of scenic viewsheds and provide for greatest visitor enjoyment.

What will be the long-term use of the 650 acres of land and facilities in the existing park on the lake’s south shoreline.

Additional comments can be submitted directing through the division’s website ([www.ncsparks.net](http://www.ncsparks.net)) by navigating to the Lake James State Park page. Summaries of the public meetings and details of planning proposals will also be posted.

During the master planning process, LandDesign will consult with the park’s staff and its citizens Park Advisory Committee as well as the division’s planning, natural resource protection and park operations teams. But, the public meetings are an important step, said Division Director Lewis Ledford.

“The addition of this property to Lake James State Park was very much a community effort, and we feel it’s important that citizens be involved in the planning process as well,” Ledford said. “A successful state park should be a vision shared by the parks system, the people who use the park and the people who are its neighbors.”



*THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY FOR SEVEN OF THE NEWEST RANGERS TOOK PLACE AT THE ARCHDALE BUILDING.*

## NEW PARK RANGERS GET COMMISSIONS

Seven new state park rangers were commissioned Feb. 25 by Superior Court Judge Clifton W. Everett Jr. of Pitt County in a ceremony at the Archdale Building in Raleigh.

The rangers who completed all requirements as special peace officers are: Brandy L. Belville, and Justin K. Brown, both of Morrow Mountain State Park; Glen W. Gorge, Crowders Mountain State Park; Katharine A. McPhail, South Mountains State Park; Janet C. Braddy, Stephen F. Brush, Michael S.



*BERRIER*

Willaford, all of Falls Lake State Recreation Area. (Mary Berrier of Gorges State Park was also commissioned, but unable to attend the ceremony.)

Everett told the new rangers that they are embarking on a "great career" and recalled fondly his experiences as a seasonal ranger at Cape Hatteras National Seashore in the 1950s.

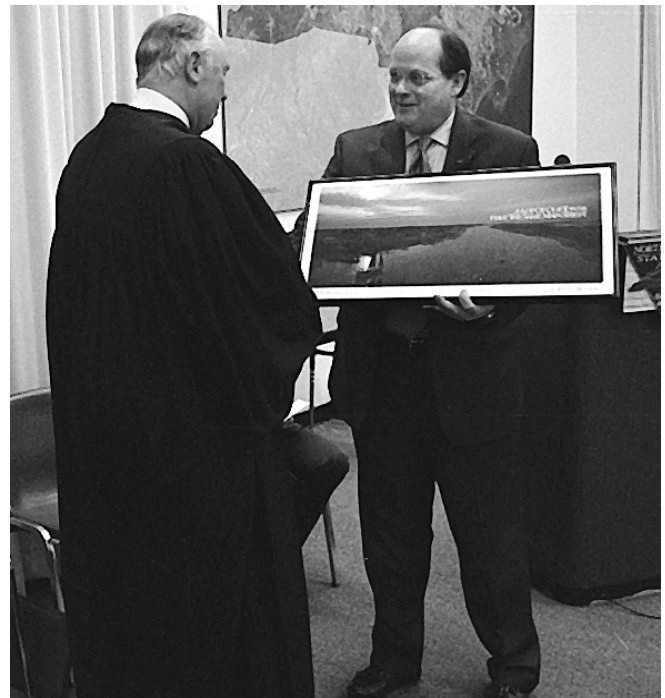
Lewis Ledford, director of the NC Division of Parks and Recreation, told the group that they should enjoy the moment and their accomplishment at becoming state park rangers, but that they should also begin to set standards and a vision for the future.

"You have what it takes to wear the ranger hat. Wear it proudly," Ledford said. "The men and women who protect our natural resources are as valuable as any of the resources themselves."

Susan Tillotson, superintendent of state

parks, added that the new rangers made a lot of sacrifices to reach their status, but those sacrifices were shared by family and friends. Family and friends should also share the pride, she said.

The commissions are granted following 16-week Basic Law Enforcement Training. New rangers are enrolled in the training soon after they are hired. Ranger candidates are also required to have at least a two-year degree and certification in fire suppression, medical first response, search and rescue and environmental education.



*DIVISION DIRECTOR LEWIS LEDFORD, RIGHT, PRESENTS JUDGE CLIFTON W. EVERETT WITH A MOMENTO.*

# ELLIS JOINS ORDER OF LONG LEAF PINE

Thomas C. “Red” Ellis, a longtime superintendent of state parks and director of the Division of Parks and Recreation was presented May 13 with the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, North Carolina’s highest honor for service and dedication.

The ceremony, during a meeting of the Parks and Recreation Authority at William B. Umstead State Park, was attended by members of Ellis’ family, members of Friends of State Parks and former division employees, including former superintendent Tom Wells and former director Phil McKnelly.

Ellis retired in 1977 after a 35-year career, having served from 1961-72 as superintendent and from 1972-77 as director. During his tenure, 18 state parks were founded and the amount of acreage managed by the state parks system more than doubled.

Also under his leadership, a system of state natural areas – representing some of the most rare and treasured natural resources – was established, with seven natural areas brought under parks system management; the Natural and Scenic Rivers System was established; and, the State Trails System was founded.

The rapid expansion of the state parks system was due, in large measure, to Ellis’ skill at combining resources from state appropriations, private donations and grants from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Soon after assuming the role of superintendent in 1961, Ellis directed a smooth transition to a fully integrated



*ELLIS, CENTER, GETS CONGRATULATIONS FROM JONATHAN HOWES, LEFT, CHAIRMAN OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION AUTHORITY AND LEWIS LEDFORD, RIGHT, DIRECTOR OF THE DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION.*

state parks system. Under his leadership in ensuing years, the system developed a program of master plans and general management plans that assured consistent, thoughtful and environmentally sustainable park development. And, resources were directed to initiatives in interpretation and environmental education, allowing education to become one of the hallmarks of the state parks mission.

A North Carolina native, Ellis began his state government career in 1942 as area ranger of Bladen Lakes State Forest, having come to state government as a veteran of the Civilian Conservation Corps and the U.S. Forest Service. By 1952, Ellis had served as senior park warden, senior park ranger and superintendent of Singletary Lake Group Camp, one of the state’s oldest parks.

From 1952-55, he served as superintendent of Morrow Mountain State Park, another of North Carolina’s first-tier state parks. Moving into an administrative role, he became assistant superintendent of state

parks in 1955.

Ellis was respected by his colleagues and renowned in the profession, having earned the particular attention and gratitude of former Governor Robert Scott. He was a member of the National Recreation and Parks Association and a director of the National Conference of State Parks. He is also an active member and past president of the Friends of State Parks and of Singletary Lake’s CCC Alumni group.

The award was presented by Lewis Ledford, current division director, who recalled that as a young ranger, he helped present Ellis’ retirement gift from the division 28 years ago. Ledford was also one of many friends and former colleagues attending a 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday event for Ellis earlier this year.

In making the presentation, Ledford said, “It is in recognition of his achievements and of his devotion to natural resource conservation in North Carolina, that Mr. Ellis was nominated as a worthy candidate for the Order of the Long Leaf Pine.”

# SNAKE VOLUNTEER CHARMS VISITORS

By Ranger Jeff Davis  
Carolina Beach State Park

Pennsylvania native Mike Himchak has a passion that makes most people cringe.

His passion began at the age of four and I guess you might say that he has been snake-charmed ever since. Fortunately for us, this is a passion that he loves sharing with others. After more than 40 years of interest in snakes, including more than 20 presenting educational programs, Mike is still fascinated by the oft-misunderstood reptile.

One day last summer, Mike presented his extremely popular program “Snakes: Separating Myth from Reality” to 60 park visitors. It marked his eleventh straight year at Carolina Beach State Park.

Through the years, crowds have been awed by a variety of local nonvenomous snakes. Crowd pleasers have been a docile copperhead and a water moccasin with a very bad attitude. Both have had their venom glands removed making them safe for educational purposes.

Mike’s childhood interest in snakes led him to the biology department at Slippery Rock University in Slippery Rock, PA. There, he acquired his biology degree as well as an extensive background of herpetological study and field experience. Snake-hunting trips through the Carolinas and Georgia with the curator of the Pittsburgh Zoo proved intriguing to Mike, and the great diversity of herps have kept him coming back down south ever since.

Though his career path



*VOLUNTEER MIKE HIMCHAK HAS PRESENTED POPULAR INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS ON SNAKES AT CAROLINA BEACH STATE PARK FOR 11 YEARS.*

eventually led him in a different direction and he now owns Phoenix Metals of Pennsylvania, Mike’s love for snakes never diminished.

Technically, Mike is an amateur herpetologist. Those fortunate enough to know him feel that is true only in the sense that he does not get paid for imparting his expertise. For when it comes to snakes, there are few people who possess a greater knowledge about them or care more for their protection.

Though he can rattle off scientific names and physiological characteristics with the best of them, Mike incorporates an added dimension to his programs. Much of what he has learned about snakes stems from years of personal experience with his own collection as well as in the field. Those

experiences, along with his unique sense of humor, add color to an already lively topic.

Mike’s personal collection includes snakes from around the world, ranging in size from a two-foot Kenyan sand boa to a 15-foot Asian python. His ability to successfully raise exotic snakes has led to many of them being displayed at the Pittsburgh Zoo.

Raising snakes is just half the fun for Mike though. Being with him in the wild is like being with a kid in a candy store. There his passion becomes most obvious! Places that give even this old southern boy the “willies” make Mike feel right at home.

A typical day catching snakes with Mike might begin in the sandhills of New Hanover County searching for black

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# BIKE TRAIL SCHOOL VISITS LAKE NORMAN

By LARRY HYDE, Ranger  
Lake Norman State Park

Jill and Chris from the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) brought their Subaru, trail tools, Powerpoint presentation, and most importantly, a wealth of sustainable trailbuilding knowledge to Lake Norman State Park January 21-23.

The pair travels across the southeast teaching how to build and maintain multi-use trails. Although their emphasis is mountain bike trails, the concepts they teach are applicable to any multi-use trail.

Lake Norman currently has 6.7 miles of bike/hike trails, called the Itusi trail (Catawba Indian for “hawk”) and another five miles are currently under volunteer construction. Invitations to attend the school were sent to federal, state and local agencies as well as bike clubs and division staff. More than 20 participants came Friday, 30 on Saturday in the rain, and 20 on Sunday. Five local bike clubs were represented.

IMBA provides a formal four-hour class, but their preference is to use existing and under-construction trails as their classroom. Friday included demonstrations on using mechanized equipment to make trails more efficiently. Participants also examined a trail in Davidson for



*SESSIONS INCLUDED FAMILIARIZATION WITH THE LATEST IN TRAIL-BUILDING EQUIPMENT.*



*THERE WAS PLENTY OF 'HANDS-ON' TRAINING DURING OUTDOOR SESSIONS OF THE THREE-DAY EVENT.*

good design features, and visited a section of trail at Lake Norman (which was showing signs of erosion) to determine design flaws and methods to improve the trail. On Friday night, participants were treated to a slide show of multi-use trails around the globe.

Saturday started with a classroom session where terms like “rolling grade dip,” “armoring” and “sweet singletrack” were as common as “when is break?” After lunch we braved a cold rain to make improvements on a section of the Itusi trail. This involved building “chokes” (visual barriers such as rocks and tree debris which don’t actually narrow the trail, but give the appearance of doing so, in order to slow riders), “nicks” (small circular cutouts of trail to drain water off), and “armoring” (creating a rock floor where the trail is holding water). Everybody was given a chance to make decisions concerning improvements and getting them completed. We discovered that to build a trail correctly, a lot of hard labor, patience and a keen eye are required.

On Sunday, we braved a 19-degree morning to work on “Phase III” of the Itusi trail. Some groups cleared debris, others graded, while my group “grubbed” – the act of removing stumps from the trail tread. It is a very slow, sometimes

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# TRAIL SCHOOL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

strenuous process. I had my epiphany when I met an old pine tree about six inches in diameter. It appeared that I would need to dig a hole about two-feet deep all the way around and use a pry bar to remove it.

However, when all was said and done, I and several others had dug a hole five feet deep, three feet wide, failed in attempting to remove it with a come-a-long, and finally used five of us with a pry bar and chain to rip it out of the ground.

This greatly amused Jim "the Grubber" Freeman, a regular Itusi trail volunteer who has found his niche and his delight in doing this sort of task every weekend.

Jill and Chris were very impressed with the park's trails, but were more impressed with the level of dedication of the



ATTENDANCE AT THE *IMBA* TRAILBUILDING SEMINAR TOPPED OUT AT ABOUT 30 DURING THE SATURDAY SESSION.

volunteers to building quality trail.

To say that more than 10,000 man-hours of volunteer labor have been put into making it one of the best bike trails in the region would be an understatement. Bob Karriker

and Jeff Archer tirelessly head up the effort, but numerous volunteers sacrifice most of their weekends in the fall, winter and spring to give thousands of visitors the opportunity to explore the park on a mountain bike or on foot.

## SNAKES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

racers, scarlet snakes, and hognoses. A while later, you may find yourself in Brunswick County hunting for water snakes and rat snakes in a marsh along the Cape Fear River.

A romp along the black-water rivers and swamps of Pender County searching for "rainbows", "muds", and eastern king snakes – all the while doing your best to avoid alligators and water moccasins – will often serve as the "icing on the cake" of a very eventful day. After nearly 10 years of collecting snakes with Mike for his programs, I have come to realize that such is an ordinary day in the life of an extraordinary friend to all of us at Carolina Beach State Park.

**'RAISING SNAKES IS JUST HALF THE FUN OF IT FOR MIKE. BEING WITH HIM IN THE WILD IS LIKE BEING WITH A KID IN A CANDY STORE. THERE, HIS PASSION BECOMES MOST OBVIOUS.'**

All too often we find ourselves so caught up in the "busyness" of park life that we forget to properly thank those who contribute so much to make the state parks better places. Each year Mike volunteers about a week out of his own busy schedule to drive 10 hours, catch snakes, present his

program, and then release them back to their original locations within the surrounding counties.

He never expects anything in return because he loves to educate people and change the negative perceptions they have about snakes. He says that the time away from work is therapeutic. Even so, his service extends beyond his annual program as he fields a constant barrage of reptile and amphibian related phone calls from park staff throughout the year.

So here's to Mike – we at Carolina Beach State Park appreciate your valuable service through the years and positive reflection that you have cast upon us, our division and the State of North Carolina.



# FORT FISHER 4WD STUDY RELEASED

Although a minority of visitors to Fort Fisher State Recreation Area uses the four-wheel-drive beach access area at night, such use adversely affects rare and endangered species, according to a study completed this spring by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

A portion of the study evaluating biological impacts of four-wheel-drive access reports that the park is home to 10 species of federal or state significance, including loggerhead sea turtles and nesting shorebirds, and the beach is used throughout the year by one or more of the listed species.

It recommends that either off-road vehicle access be prohibited for six months of the year or that two miles of the four-mile strand permanently be made off limits to vehicles. The economic component of the study shows, however, that completely prohibiting four-wheel drive access would result in a significant negative impact on the local economy.

In light of the study results, officials of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources have determined the current management policy which restricts four-wheel-drive access to daylight hours for six months of the year should be continued as an effective way to balance recreation and conservation interests.

The three-month study was conducted by UNCW faculty at the direction of the General Assembly in response to public concerns about access restrictions at Fort Fisher imposed by the Division of Parks and Recreation in 2004. The team of researchers was asked to gauge the demand for vehicle access, the impact of vehicle access on sea turtles, nesting shorebirds and other rare species and the economic impact of

restricting access.

Although all beach areas at the state park are accessible to foot traffic 24 hours a day, the section of beach where four-wheel-drive vehicles are allowed by permit is closed at night from mid-March until mid-September under the current policy.

The study has been forwarded to the General Assembly's Environmental Review Commission. It is accompanied by DENR's recognition that the research team suggested additional study and by the agency's recommendation that no changes be made to the current management policy.

Drs. James Herstine, Jeffery Hill and Robert Buerger assessed the demand for four-wheel-drive access at Fort Fisher. They found that during September through February – which includes the peak sportfishing season – 73 percent of visitors driving onto the four-wheel-drive beach used it exclusively in the daytime. Daytime users account for 79 percent of total visits in other months. The results were compiled from surveys of visitors and from tallies made by a computer-controlled access gate installed at Fort Fisher last fall.

The research team also noted the study is limited in scope and should be continued for two years in order to fully support management decisions.

Dr. David Webster, in examining biological impacts, also suggested more study could fully determine Fort Fisher's importance to threatened shorebirds and colonial waterbirds in terms of migration, wintering and nesting. However, current research is conclusive that four-wheel-drive traffic adversely affects threatened species, he said.

Economic analysis by Dr.

Chris Dumas concluded the current restrictions on four-wheel-drive access have a limited impact on the tourism-based region. The analysis was modeled using information on vehicle counts and data from the 120 surveys conducted by other research team members.

Dumas reported unrestricted access likely would prompt 28,884 trips per year onto the four-wheel-drive access beach.

Information from the surveys suggests mean direct expenditures of \$388 per trip, which would directly contribute \$11.2 million to the local economy. Dumas' model predicts that those direct contributions could have a total economic impact of \$21.6 million in annual regional sales. The current park policy of daytime-only access for six months of the year is estimated to reduce the direct and indirect economic benefits by about 4 percent, supporting \$20.7 million in annual regional sales.

The surveys indicate more than two-thirds of nighttime drivers are local residents (86 percent during summer months, and 71 percent in the fall and winter). According to the study, local users would presumably spend less for trips onto the Fort Fisher beach than visitors from outside the county who would have additional travel and lodging expenses.

The current access policy was implemented a year ago, along with a daily \$10 vehicle access fee. Park visitors also have the option to pay \$40 for an annual permit to allow an unlimited number of visits.

(The complete text of the UNCW study is available on the Division of Parks and Recreation website, [www.ncsparks.net](http://www.ncsparks.net).)

# AUTHORITY APPROVES 36 LOCAL GRANTS

The Parks and Recreation Authority awarded \$10.8 million in grants to 36 local governments for parks and recreation projects during its May meeting.

"This year, the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund generated a record amount for grants to local governments, but the authority also reviewed a record number of applications," said Jonathan Howes, chairman of the 22-member authority.

"I think this indicates that local governments throughout the state have come to rely on the trust fund in their planning process, and they are using the program to plan for more extensive projects."

One third of this year's grant applications were for the maximum grant amount of \$500,000. The maximum was raised just this year from \$250,000.

PARTF grants are matched dollar-for-dollar by the local governments. Thirty percent of the trust fund is earmarked for the program. The trust fund is

supported by the state's tax on real estate deed transfers and also funds state park land acquisition and capital projects and coastal beach access.

The \$10.8 million represented the local government share of revenues for the first three quarters of the fiscal year.

Fourth-quarter revenues for that portion of the trust fund could be as much as \$2.9 million, and more applications will be considered in July.

Among this year's applicants, 63 percent were municipalities and 26 percent were counties. There are two applications from city/county partnerships. The bulk of the applications (72 percent) were for park development, but there were applications for land acquisition totaling 744 acres.

Since the trust fund was established 11 years ago, the authority has distributed grants totaling more than \$70 million to 758 applicants in 98 of the state's 100 counties.

## STATE PARKS PROJECTS WIN APPROVAL

The Parks and Recreation Authority approved capital improvement and land acquisition projects for the state parks system during its March meeting.

Full funding for the visitor center and exhibit hall at Dismal Swamp State Natural Area has been approved with an additional \$1.47 million from 2004-05 PARTF revenues. Construction of the visitor center – along with a swing-span pedestrian bridge over the Dismal Swamp Canal – will mark the area's new status as an operational unit of the state parks system.

The parks system acquired the 14,344-acre tract at Dismal Swamp in 1974. The Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge of 111,000 acres abuts the park on the north and west.

Construction of the 80-foot-by-16-foot bridge – which will connect to a 40-foot-long pier – began with a groundbreaking ceremony in mid-March. Construction of the 6,500-square-foot visitor center will likely begin this summer. The total estimated cost of the bridge, visitor center, exhibit hall and outdoor viewing area with boardwalk and gazebo is \$4.1 million.

Part of this year's allocation to Dismal Swamp was diverted from projects that were delayed at Falls Lake State Recreation Area and William B. Umstead State Park. An additional \$450,000 came from a project coming in under budget at Kerr Lake State Recreation Area.

The authority also approved four land



*FUNDING HAS BEEN SET ASIDE FOR A VISITOR CENTER AT THE DISMAL SWAMP STATE NATURAL AREA.*

acquisition projects totaling \$2.34 million. Those are:

- \$1.65 million for the new Haw River State Park in Rockingham County.
- \$425,000 at Fort Macon State Park for a large parcel adjacent to the park's entrance.
- \$200,000 for a small parcel at the Reedy Creek entrance to William B. Umstead State Park.
- And, \$70,000 in reserve for any unexpected costs associated with the purchase of the Eure family tract at the northeast boundary of William B. Umstead State Park.

# FESTIVAL TEACHES BIRD CONSERVATION

By Ranger Curtis Dykstra  
Goose Creek State Park

On May 14, Goose Creek State Park was once again full of those quirky people we call birders (including myself!). In celebration of International Migratory Bird Day, Goose Creek held its Second Annual Bird Day Festival, an event designed to educate people about bird conservation and to create some fun birding competition.

A bird-a-thon competition was the highlight event again this year. Teams competed for donated prizes by identifying the most bird species throughout the day.

People at any level of bird knowledge participated in three experience-based categories based on their ability to identify birds by sight and sound. This year's winning team identified more than 70 species with a grand total of 80 birds identified during the day.

We were able to add two new birds to our list, the yellow-breasted chat and the blackpoll warbler.

In addition to the bird-a-thon, many other family-friendly events such as bird-related hikes, games, programs and craft activities were held during the day. We had more than 250 park visitors take part in the festival. The not-for-profit Knights of Columbus provided plenty of food at their concession stand, and kids of all ages were able to pose with the wood duck mascot.

The day's events ended with the "Birds of Prey – Live!" show, put on by the Outer Banks Wildlife Shelter and sponsored by the Goose Creek Education Foundation. The free program,



*BIRDS OF PREY-LIVE', PRESENTED BY THE OUTER BANKS WILDLIFE SHELTER, ENDED THE DAY'S EVENTS.*



*GOOSE CREEK STATE PARK'S WOOD DUCK MASCOT WAS A POPULAR ATTRACTION FOR YOUNG VISITORS.*

attended by more than 70 visitors, featured a live peregrine falcon, American kestrel, barred owl and eastern screech owl.

This year's theme for the international event was "Collisions: Clear the Way for Birds".

As birds migrate they encounter numerous obstacles including cell phone towers, power lines, vehicles, home and office building windows and even wind turbines. Bird deaths due to collisions with these obstacles are estimated to be in the billions each year.

The program "Migration Headache" dealt directly with this year's theme by involving children and adults in a fun activity. Area fourth graders were given the opportunity to participate in the "collisions" theme with a coloring contest.

Posters depicting the theme were colored, and bird-related prizes were awarded for the top three posters.

It was a great day for all who participated, even the staff members who lost a few pounds sweating under the wood duck suit. We felt the festival was an even bigger success than last year's event, and we are looking forward to our Third Annual Bird Day Festival April 29, 2006.

# NEW STATE PARKS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

initiative of the Division of Parks and Recreation. That planning effort examined and ranked all known sites in the state in terms of recreation potential and natural resource significance.

"Both of these new state parks will further our mission of protecting the state's natural diversity," said Lewis Ledford, division director. "And, both present excellent opportunities to deepen our partnerships for conservation across the state."

In the 2003 legislative session, new state parks were authorized at Mayo River and Haw River, both in Rockingham County, and land acquisition for both has begun. Also, new state natural areas have been established on the lower Haw River in Chatham County, at Elk Knob in Watauga County and at Beech Creek Bog in Avery County.

To fund the new acquisitions, the parks system will turn to the state's three conservation trust funds – Parks and Recreation, Clean Water Management and Natural Heritage – to varying degrees. The Natural Heritage Trust Fund has already committed \$4 million to the Carvers Creek Sandhills project.

At Carvers Creek Sandhills, The Nature Conservancy purchased a 1,172-acre tract in 2001 at the northern edge of Fayetteville and near Ft. Bragg's eastern boundary. The purchase price was \$5.52 million.

"It's now or never, because land is being developed so quickly," said the conservancy's Rick Studenmund. "We have an opportunity now to protect one of the finest tracts of longleaf pines in the state."

The area is home to at least nine species of importance,



*VIEW ALONG THE RIDGE LINE OF RUMBLING BALD MOUNTAIN.*

including the red-cockaded woodpecker and the Atlantic white cedar.

The Nature Conservancy is also negotiating with owners of adjoining properties. There is a short-term potential for a 2,668-acre park that would protect a significant area of longleaf pine, provide recreation in a growing urban area and help provide a buffer for Ft. Bragg.

Rep. Margaret Dickson of Cumberland County said, "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to preserve a pristine forest for people in Cumberland County and all of North Carolina to enjoy. The park is a win-win proposition that will protect a state treasure and enhance land use around our military bases."

Dickson was among a number of legislators that toured the property in April with officials of the state parks, the trust funds and Col. Al Aycock, garrison commander at Ft. Bragg.

The proposal for a new park at Hickory Nut Gorge also enjoys strong local and legislative support.

"Establishing a state park here in Rutherford County will offer many benefits to the people of North Carolina and to visitors

from other states. We'll see economic development from increased recreation and tourism opportunities," said Sen. Walter H. Dalton, a primary co-sponsor of the Senate bill.

The conservancy property under consideration is an 850-acre tract on the northern flank of Rumbling Bald Mountain. The property has not been appraised.

The mountain, an imposing 3,020-foot-high ridge rising from the western tip of Lake Lure, is a popular draw for rock climbers.

The authorizing legislation referred to the gorge's "spectacular cliffs, rugged mountains, fissure caves, waterfalls and unusually rich soils that support at least 36 rare plant species and 14 rare animals."

Examples include the federally endangered white irisette and green salamander, and populations of a rare pygmy shrew and cave-adapted arachnid species.

Partners in the project include the Foothills Conservancy, the Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy, the Rutherford Outdoor Coalition, the Upper Broad River Protection Project, the Carolina Climbers Coalition and the Access Fund.

these common histories and missions, Audubon North Carolina and the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation are developing a "Partners in Conservation" initiative. This public/private collaboration will bring together our efforts toward a new century of land conservation and new generations of conservationists devoted to the natural wonders of North Carolina.

Beyond the historic, Audubon and state parks share considerable common ground in current activities.

A number of the sites in the North Carolina Coastal Islands Sanctuary system are state properties assigned to the division that are managed by Audubon. Battery Island, home to 10 percent of the breeding population of white ibises in North America, is one such place. We would like to continue to enlarge this element of our work together.

On a larger scale, our recently completed analysis reveals that 22 state parks, state recreation areas, state natural areas and lakes qualified as Important Bird Areas of North Carolina. An additional six park sites are likely to gain IBA status with future data. All told, almost 100,000 acres of state parks are IBAs.

It is clear our mutual advantage lies in supporting and expanding these parks for the good of birds and the public.

One reason so many parks qualified as IBAs is the quality and quantity of data available. Citizen scientists from Audubon chapters and other groups have counted birds for years in the 14 parks included in the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count, with 19 other bird data collection efforts under way at state parks.

And our popular *Birding in North Carolina State Parks* guide represents an important step in raising awareness of the importance of parks for bird watching and conservation. An expanded effort at promoting bird-related activities at our parks will lead to greater public participation, appreciation, and support for bird-friendly management.

Taking off from this common ground, Audubon and state parks will pursue a range of opportunities for mutual benefit.

Perhaps the greatest area of focus for expanded collaboration will be in environmental education. Of all our statewide entities, the Division of Parks and Recreation has the greatest commitment to educating the public about natural areas, as well as the most extensive lands and facilities for doing so.



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT AT PETTIGREW STATE PARK.

Audubon will make use of and expand opportunities at selected parks through teacher training, educational trails, and public programs. Special efforts will be made at those parks that are IBAs and those soon to be joined to the statewide North Carolina Birding Trail.

As our joint planning reveals lands important for expanding current parks or establishing new ones, especially those holding significant bird habitats, Audubon staff and members will work to rally support within the public and government. Our grassroots network has already shown its value in the case of the Haw River State Park project, where local Audubon members from Guilford County have played pivotal roles in advancing land acquisition opportunities.

Advocating for sufficient funding and appropriate management at state parks will also become a growing part of Audubon's partnership. State parks personnel need our support in resource management that balances public uses with the needs of wildlife and natural systems. Many local chapters and members already have favorite state parks they support in so many ways. We hope to link and expand those efforts to become a statewide voice for the future of our parks.

"We are proud to launch this partnership with Audubon," said Lewis Ledford, division director. "It couldn't come at a better time as we look to realize our New Parks for a New Century vision and make environmental education an even greater part of the park experience."

While the details of the "Partners in Conservation" initiative are still being worked out, the commitment to joint efforts at conservation and education is strong and long-term. With the state parks and Audubon as partners, the future of our natural areas looks greener than ever.



# LAKE NORMAN DEDICATES SWIM COMPLEX

Lake Norman State Park dedicated a new swim beach complex April 29, marking the completion of a \$3.1 million improvement project at the only public swimming area on the 32,510-acre lake.

The two-year project was funded through the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, which is supported in turn, by the state's tax on real estate deed transfers.

In the past five years, there have been more than \$5 million in projects completed at the Iredell County park that were supported by the trust fund and a 1993 bond referendum. These include land acquisition to expand park buffers and a popular community center dedicated in 2001.

The swim complex includes a 125-yard-long sand beach, a 3,084-square-foot bathhouse and concession building, a 500-square-foot toilet building, a 50-foot fully accessible fishing pier, a 300-space parking area, and picnic grounds with 75 individual sites and two 1,952-square-foot shelters.

"We're very excited about this new swim complex, and it has already become very popular since construction was



*A 3,084-SQUARE-FOOT BATHHOUSE ANCHORS THE NEW SWIM COMPLEX.*

completed in November. We wanted an opportunity to formally unveil it to the community," said Park Superintendent Casey Rhinehart.

"Alongside our developing system of mountain bike trails, Lake Norman State Park now has a broader repertoire of recreation opportunities than ever."

Rhinehart added that plans are still being considered for the park's old swim beach area, located on a small impoundment adjoining Lake Norman. The park's boat rental operation will continue at that site, but it is among several being considered for a park visitor center to be constructed

eventually.

That small swim beach, constructed in the 1960s, was sometimes overcrowded and water quality was periodically poor.

The new swim beach complex is located in the southwestern part of the 1,611-acre park. Currently, there is no charge for swimming, and there are no parking or admission fees at the park.

Architect for the project was DTW Architects of Durham, and general contractor was Farley Associates.

Lake Norman State Park was created in 1962 by a donation of land from Duke Power Co. and had 445,275 visitors in 2004.

## SPECIAL AWARDS

*FOUR VOLUNTEERS AT LAKE NORMAN STATE PARK WERE PRESENTED WITH SPECIAL AWARDS APRIL 29 FROM LEWIS LEDFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION FOR THEIR WORK IN CREATING THE ITUSI MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL SYSTEM. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT ARE WES STEARNES, BOB KARRIKER, JEFF ARCHER AND JIM FREEMAN.*



# North Carolina State Parks

## Monthly Attendance Report, April 2005

PARK	APRIL 2005	TOTAL YTD APR. 2005	APRIL 2004	TOTAL YTD APR. 2004	% CHANGE (2004/2005)	
					APR.	YTD
Carolina Beach	20,796	44,218	23,872	58,294	-13%	-24%
Cliffs of the Neuse	7,795	23,044	10,331	27,651	-25%	-17%
Crowder's Mountain	34,061	114,003	35,643	111,389	-4%	2%
Eno River	30,040	95,454	29,382	90,471	2%	6%
Falls Lake	70,055	143,270	50,453	112,195	39%	28%
Fort Fisher	57,546	168,136	71,354	183,538	-19%	-8%
Fort Macon	87,102	260,356	115,840	278,916	-25%	-7%
Goose Creek	14,062	40,770	14,443	46,976	-3%	-13%
Gorges	7,726	21,878	10,907	28,284	-29%	-23%
Hammocks Beach	9,738	28,689	12,399	33,117	-21%	-13%
Hanging Rock	25,908	68,193	30,500	72,327	-15%	-6%
Jockey's Ridge	67,100	150,630	90,056	166,426	-25%	-9%
Jones Lake	6,364	20,300	9,648	26,730	-34%	-24%
Jordan Lake	204,994	317,576	113,216	164,603	81%	93%
Kerr Lake	106,464	290,320	143,168	318,752	-26%	-9%
Lake James	46,560	119,373	24,953	56,555	87%	111%
Lake Norman	40,935	122,937	47,223	132,486	-13%	-7%
Lake Waccamaw	6,492	18,672	7,922	20,102	-18%	-7%
Lumber River	4,795	14,865	4,170	16,245	15%	-8%
Medoc Mountain	3,592	10,086	4,535	12,794	-21%	-21%
Merchant's Millpond	21,584	59,048	23,040	50,979	-6%	16%
Morrow Mountain	15,190	42,220	24,730	70,900	-39%	-40%
Mount Jefferson	5,428	16,756	7,164	21,554	-24%	-22%
Mount Mitchell	7,655	15,573	34,036	55,637	-78%	-72%
New River	6,101	21,395	7,869	23,846	-22%	-10%
Occoneechee Mountain	4,977	15,575	3,923	11,917	27%	31%
Pettigrew	6,285	18,220	9,686	20,994	-35%	-13%
Pilot Mountain	31,728	96,522	34,560	98,822	-8%	-2%
Raven Rock	12,598	35,390	11,725	34,458	7%	3%
Singletary Lake	2,982	9,602	3,734	7,175	-20%	34%
South Mountains	22,114	62,480	0	31,582	0%	98%
Stone Mountain	31,380	86,188	35,784	103,656	-12%	-17%
Weymouth Woods	3,426	14,550	4,243	15,532	-19%	-6%
William B. Umstead	55,039	174,176	45,623	144,372	21%	21%
<b>SYSTEMWIDE TOTAL</b>	<b>1,078,612</b>	<b>2,740,465</b>	<b>1,096,132</b>	<b>2,649,275</b>	<b>-2%</b>	<b>3%</b>

# Mission

The mission of the North Carolina Division of Parks & Recreation is:

to protect North Carolina's natural diversity;

to provide and promote outdoor recreation opportunities throughout North Carolina;

*and*

to exemplify and encourage good stewardship of North Carolina's natural resources

for all citizens and visitors of North Carolina.

## ***SAFETY ZONE*** **Be Cool About Summer Safety**

✓Use sunscreen with an SPF equivalent of 15 or more and wear clothing that minimizes exposed skin.

✓Drink plenty of water. Avoid alcohol and caffeine in hot weather.

✓Avoid sun when possible during its brightest times between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

✓Take frequent breaks out of the sun to cool off from the heat.



### *The Steward*

NC Division of Parks and Recreation  
Public Information Office  
1615 MSC  
Raleigh, NC 27699-1615